

## From the President's desk...

It was not a day like any other. The country was in fever pitch. Minds rode high on emotions. Those minds manifested their anger and frustration through *bandh*, burning of tires and road blocks. The public were protesting the price hike of fuels. For the Fulbright people this day came with a difference. However, for us too tensions became tangible. Telephone calls grew frequent. Doubts and indecisiveness pervaded our minds. It was August 19, 2006 the day of our second Democracy Forum. We had to decide whether we wanted to go ahead with the earlier schedule. After much deliberation we decided the show must go on. To add to all this there was a dismal downpour of rain. The few cabs that plied the deserted streets of Kathmandu dared not look at us, they feared for their own safety. Perhaps they were there as an emergency measure, for someone to take a sick or disabled to the hospital. We trudged on, with a backpack full of bare necessities for the Forum, umbrella in one hand and many a rolled up posters in the other.

For almost one and a half hour we hiked in the rain until we finally reached our 'Democracy' venue—Koteshwar Mahadev. Slowly I forgot the difficult hike, the tiredness and the feel of hopelessness when slowly the people began to congregate under the tent. It was a delight to see how many of them thought the forum to be an important one. These community people, they were there, eager and enthused by the chaos outside and the theme of the Forum that was to be discussed under the tent.


The theme of our second Forum was "Constitution, Rule of Law and Democracy." And I was very happily surprised to see how the local people—our target audience fell over their heels to get answers to the questions that had always lain at the back of their minds? What does Constitutional Assembly mean? Who forms it? What is the role of women

in the politics of the governed? And many more questions, which I thought would never end.

The first Forum had been conducted in the heart of the city, *Kasthamandap*, in Basantapur. The local people told me this was the first time such a forum had ever been conducted there which included only such community people. The Forum was on "Envisioning Democracy." Democracy then had just arrived yet again in Nepal, people were euphoric. At the Forum many talked about their ideas of a *lokanttric* utopia. We organizers were happy.

But somehow, it was the third forum which took place in an ancient little town in Kathmandu, Handigaon, that charmed me the most. Perhaps because it was in my own home area and on a theme that was closest to my heart. "Women in Democracy: Giving Voice to the Voiceless." The eager participation of women that day had left a feeling of sweet affinity with all women. It had been raining for several days. That day, the sun came out just as we began to think of starting the program. The women disappeared. These women of the community had gone home to hurriedly put out their clothes to dry in the sun. We started the program twenty minutes late. All were back in their seats.

Now through this newsletter I would like to invite any Fulbrighter who is either interested to speak as the main speaker in the Forums, or organize or/and a mere observer. We look forward to seven more such Democracy Forums. Perhaps running democracy forums has a symbiotic relationship with walking through rain, storms and chaos. By the same token, we strongly believe that democracy forums are the most needed small agora sessions that we need now more than ever before because we are crossing the threshold of a turbulent history and entering into the new and bright realms of the times.

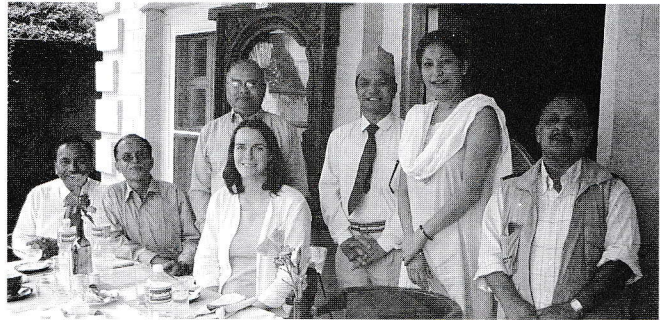


## FAAN NEWS

- Professor Frank R. Ettensohn from the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Kentucky, made a presentation on June 7. The title of his presentation was "The Geologic Origin of Major Hazards and Crises in South Asia." The program was held at the Fulbright Commission hall in Gyaneshwar. Professor Ettensohn is now in the US after having completed his Fulbright grant here in Nepal.
- Aaron Ted Samuel, an American Fulbright scholar, a graduate in International Studies and doing his research on transgender in South India was on a visit to Nepal in June. While in Kathmandu he presented a Tamil dance, "Karagattam" at Gurukul, Sama Theatre. He also gave a talk on, *Karagattakarigal: Exploring the Expansion of Gender Roles in Karagattam Dance*. The program was jointly organized by FAAN and International Theatre Institute (ITI) on June 2.
- Dr Sangita Rayamajhi will be attending the Conference "Fulbright Alumni: Expressions in Civil Society," in Marrakech, Morocco, November 3 to November 5, 2006 organized by the US Fulbright Association. This Conference is in collaboration with the Moroccan Fulbright Alumni Association, whose conference, "Morocco in Western Art," will follow from the evening of November 5 to November 7. She will be making a presentation, "Women in Civil Society: Prospects and Challenges." The Moroccan-American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange has supported the planning and implementation of both the conferences.
- On the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States, U.S. Ambassador James F. Moriarty held a memorial ceremony at his residence in Kathmandu. Representatives from the Government of Nepal, the diplomatic community, and other guests were present on the occasion. "The fight against terrorism is a concerted fight for values and

principles that are universal," the Ambassador noted. "Much more unites us than divides us. Across all borders, people share a common humanity," he said. Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi, also addressed the audience. "The countries of Asia have experienced the pains caused by terrorist attacks. But the greatest antidote to the pain of terrorism is greater democracy and respect of human rights and people's liberties and respect to each other's faiths," she said. Her remarks, were followed by an ecumenical prayer. The event ended after Marines from the U.S. Embassy lowered the American flag to the strains of "Taps" and then raised it as the American national anthem played.

- **Congratulations!** We Fulbrighters are proud that Fulbright Alumnus Mohammed Yunnus of Bangladesh has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2006. No work is too small for universal recognition if the work is directed for the cause of larger humanity. We at FAAN would like to believe that our Democracy Forum too would one day spread its wings throughout the world.



Ms. Laura Lucas (seated third from left) with FAAN officials at farewell reception in Kathmandu

- Ms Laura Lucas completed her posting in Kathmandu as deputy director of American Centre in late August 2006. Ms. Lucas had long lasting contact with Nepalese Fulbrighters. She is now back in Washington D.C. preparing for her new assignments.
- FAAN General Secretary Hriseekesh Upadhyay has compiled a book *Reflections on Democracy* for Democracy Forum 2006/07. The book contains over 200 significant quotations on diverse issues of democracy ranging from Plato to Mahatma Gandhi, from Jefferson to J.F. Kennedy. The book contains a foreword from FAAN President and it is circulated among the Forum participants.

### Condolence

**Mingma Norbu Sherpa** WWF Fulbright Grant Year 1997. FAAN mourns the untimely demise of a promising environmentalist in a tragic plane crash in September.

## Democracy Forum Highlights

### Forum I: Envisioning Democracy What the People Make out of Democracy

Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal (FAAN) organized its first discussion session on July 10 at Basantapur, marking the beginning of its ten discussion sessions. It began with the welcome speech by the General Secretary, Hriseekesh Upadhyay. Minister for Education and Sports Dr. Mangal Siddhi Manandhar and the Deputy Chief of the US Embassy in Nepal Mr. Nicholas J. Dean addressed the gathering and wished for the success of the Democratic Forum. The first session ended with the presidential remarks by Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi.



**From left:** FAAN President, General Secretary, Mr. Nicholas J. Dean, DCM US Embassy, and Dr. Mangal S. Manandhar, Minister of Education /Fulbrighter.



Elderly participants Bhagavati Shrestha (L) and Gopal K. Shrestha shared the honour of inaugurating the Forum I at the Kasthamandap Temple in Basantapur.

The discussion session was moderated by Bijay KC. Mr. Govinda Adhikari and Ms. Sabitri Thapa Gurung as guest speakers spoke on “Envisioning Democracy: What the people make out of democracy”. They shed light on the meaning and implication of democracy in the present context of our country. Later they clarified many questions related to democracy during the question answer time. FAAN Vice President Mr. Madan Mohan Das, the treasurer Ram Bhakta Amatya and executive member Deuti Baral also spoke on the occasion. The program created a sense of curiosity and eagerness among the participants. Over two hundred people from different sectors of life attended the program.



**Adding Voice to Democracy Interaction:** From left front row: Dr. Dilli Devi Shakya, Dr. Bijay K.C., Mr. Govinda Adhikari and Mrs. Savitri Thapa Gurung .



Members of Forum audience

## Forum II: Constitution, Rule of Law and Democracy: Citizens and the State Apparatus

FAAN organized its second discussion session titled “Constitution, Rule of Law and Democracy: Citizens and the State Apparatus” at Koteswor on August 19. Mr. Amresh Singh was invited as a special guest speaker for the discussion program. Due to strike on that day, another woman guest speaker could not arrive for the discussion session.

The Forum organizers-FAAN believe: Democracy is about citizens being able to identify problems and having opportunity to freely discuss them to understand how the problem really affects the society and weighing possible alternatives to resolve them. The participants expressed full concurrence to this concept.



FAAN President Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi introducing the Forum topic.

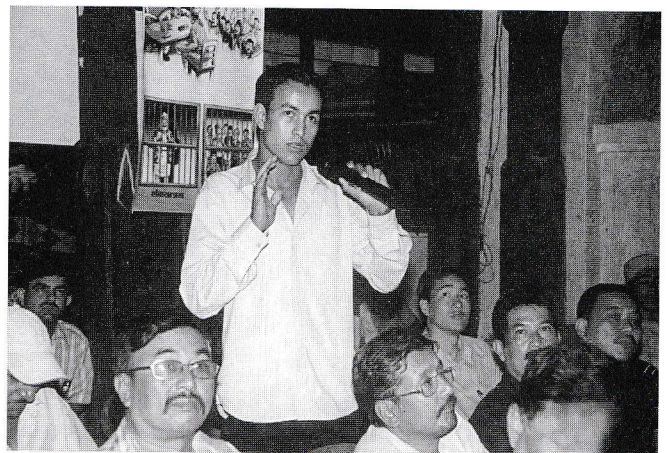


FAAN General Secretary Hriseekesh Upadhyay eliciting response from Mr. Gopal K. Shrestha (seated).

Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi chaired the session and Mr. Hriseekesh Upadhyay welcomed the participants. During his speech Mr. Singh highlighted on the role of citizens in a law abiding society. He said that citizen should be aware to get the benefit of democracy for all. He raised the question of giving equal rights to the people belonging to different groups and sections. FAAN Vice President Mr. Madan Mohan Das and the treasurer Ram Bhakta Amataya also spoke on the occasion. Over 200 participants attended the program despite the *Bandha* and rainy day.



A group of volunteers who made the Forum events successful



Young participants have much to say about democracy.

### Forum III: Giving Voice to Voiceless Women in Democracy

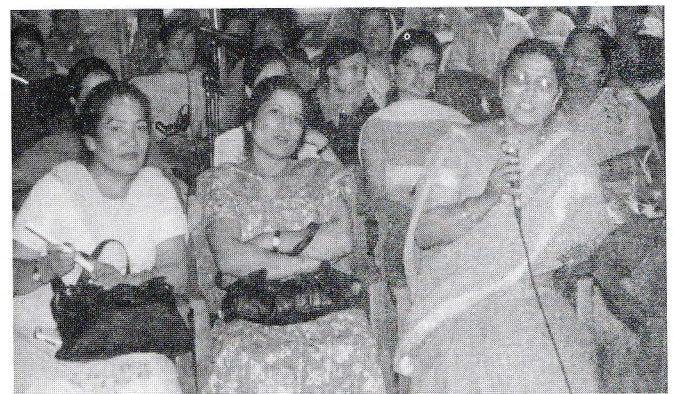


**Democracy Forum III in progress:** (from left) FAAN president Dr. Rayamajhi, Ms. Sharon, Hudson-Dean of US Embassy, Dr. Peter Moran-Fulbright Nepal Executive Director, Vice President Mr. M.M. Das, General Secretary Mr. Upadhyay and Former FAAN President Ajit Narsingh Thapa.



"If only we had a fair deal ...." A young woman adds her concern.

FAAN organized its community based third initiative on September 9, 2006, at Handigaoun, Kathmandu. The inaugural session was chaired by the President Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi. In the beginning the General Secretary Hriseekesh Upadhyay highlighted on the objectives of Democratic Forum. The program was attended by Deputy Speaker, Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy Director of American Centre Ms. Sharon Hudson-Dean, and the Executive Director of the Fulbright Nepal Dr. Peter Moran. The program began with the welcome address by FAAN vice president Madan Mohan Das and ended with the vote of thanks by Dr. Shreedhar Gautam, FAAN Secretary



Women participants seek their voice heard in Democracy Forum.

## Mountain Development Strategy for Nepal: The Need and the Challenge

*Pitamber Sharma\**

**Middle and High Mountains and High Himal together comprise about three-fourths of Nepal's land area. One would therefore assume that development in Nepal should largely mean mountain development. That, however, is not the case.**

In the last five decades or so, there have been significant changes in the demographic scenario of Nepal. In 1952/54, the Tarai and Inner Tarai harboured about 35 percent of the total population of the country. At the present Tarai and Inner Tarai districts have about 54 percent of the population. This phenomenal redistribution of population was shaped by many forces, chief among these is the availability of arable land. Eighty-eight percent of the land in the Tarai proper falls in Class 1 and 2 categories which is the best land for agriculture. This category is less than 7 percent in the case of the hills and mountains. In spite of the continuing migration from the hills to the plains in general the person-land ratio in the hills and mountains remains much above that in the Tarai. Recent studies show that the population-pressure index is negative in the Tarai. Also, Tarai remains the hub of Nepal's agricultural and industrial production.

The hill-mountain region also remains overwhelmingly rural. If Kathmandu valley were excluded, less than 7 percent of the hill-mountain population is urban. As many as ten hill/mountain districts and seventeen hill-mountain district headquarters remained unconnected by road till the year 2000. Of the total road mileage of a little over 15000 km in the country, 59 percent was in Tarai and Inner Tarai districts, 8 percent in the Kathmandu Valley, and 33 percent in the rest of the hills and mountains. Road density in the Tarai is over four times that in the hill-mountains. Although social indicators such as literacy and access to services have improved in the hills, production related indicators have hardly improved. Hill economy is becoming more and more a remittance dependent economy.

Under these conditions what can be the prognosis for the development of the hill-mountain region in Nepal? Are the hills doomed to remain marginalized as manpower and capital continue to be attracted to the plains and urban areas, and as the dictates of liberalization and globalization arbitrate against "costly" infrastructural investments in the hills?

The present demographic picture reveals that while Nepal remains a predominantly mountainous country, it may no longer be so in population terms. The continuing developmental neglect of the hill-mountain regions and increasing infrastructural and urban development in the plains has provided impetus to a new kind of migration to these areas. Unlike earlier movements this migration is increasingly motivated by search for non-agricultural employment by a largely young, educated population. The Maoist insurgency and the problem of peace and security in the hills has undoubtedly expedited such migration. As the demographic balance tilts progressively more in favour of the plains and urban areas the hill-mountain region is bound to lose the historically-rooted political clout it had enjoyed. This will translate into development policies that will increasingly favour investments in the Tarai.

Can the Tarai continue to absorb population movement from the hills? The pace of frontier migration to the Tarai has slackened considerably primarily because available agricultural land has been saturated by an increasing population. The scope for extensive resettlement also remains restricted because it can occur only at the cost of large-scale deforestation. The new migration to the Tarai could be much more urban oriented than it had been in the past. In this sense the conditions for urban growth in the Tarai could very well determine its capacity to absorb population movement from the hills. But can Tarai economy grow at the neglect of the hill-mountain economy and environment?

There are at least three inter-related linkages between the highlands and lowlands in Nepal: the ecological/hydrological linkage, the demographic linkages, and economic linkages. The ecological/hydrological linkage is expressed in the drainage regime and the impact of the environmental deterioration of the hill-mountains on the Tarai. Deforestation, increased erosion and soil loss in the mountains would mean increased flooding, siltation

and consequent downstream impacts on watersheds in the Tarai. The demographic linkage is expressed in population movements and migration. Migration from the hills to the plains and urban areas is a symptom of the lack of opportunities in the hill/mountain regions. Deterioration in environmental condition of mountains, declining productivity and lack of opportunities would mean greater migration to the Tarai and urban areas. Increased migration from the mountains would also mean abandonment of available arable land and decreased prospects for harnessing of comparative advantage of mountain resources. The economic linkage is expressed in resources and products that are traded between the highlands and the lowlands. At present this flow particularly from the highlands to the lowlands is not only small in volume, relative to the potential that exists, but also under-priced, under-valued, at times over-extracted, and is accompanied by many uncompensated transfers.

The strengthening of complementary economic flows between the highlands and the plains may indeed be the key to Nepal's development. This also has the potential of having a positive impact on the ecological and demographic linkages indicated above. But ironically enough, development policies in Nepal remain woefully insensitive to mountain conditions, particularly in harnessing the niche-specific comparative advantages.

The crux of the matter is that the condition of mountain environment and resources and conditions and productivity of the environment and resources of the Tarai are critically inter-related. Development policies need to focus on this inter-relationship. Mountain resource advantages such as hydro power, tourism, horticultural crops, off-farm vegetables and seeds, medicinal plants and herbs etc. can provide the basis for a better and complementary economic linkage between mountains and plains which can benefit both the regions. *Indeed, from a national perspective sustainable development of the hill-mountain region may in the long run be the condition for sustainable development of the Tarai.*

The regional development approach proposed in the 1970s by the late Dr. Harka Gurung was an attempt at articulating a mountain development strategy that was based in facilitating highland-lowland interaction. The

country was divided into development regions so that planning could take into account the disparities existing within and between regions. The strategy advocated a process of deliberate urbanization by aggregating activities and concentrating investments in selected potential locations—regional development centres and other growth centres. Unfortunately, the regional development strategy proposed in the Fourth Plan never received the status of a national political commitment. What the strategy lacked was the discreet identification of the resource base, and a strategy for potential investments. The context of development in Nepal has changed much since the 1970s but the need to revisit the strategy and develop a context-specific strategy for mountain development has never been greater.

In Nepal's context environment friendly economic development of mountain areas cannot be achieved through implementation of a few programmes; such efforts need to be based on the harnessing of a major resource base. Programmes of different agencies of the government at different levels, and NGOs need to be coordinated within the overall framework of an area-based mountain development strategy. The formulation of such a strategy itself has to be an exercise based on participation and feedback of all concerned actors—the government at all levels, NGOs, major donors and private sector.

The conceptualization and operationalization of such a strategy in the context of decentralization and the restructuring of the State is a major challenge for planners and politicians in Nepal. A progressive and inclusive state can be sustained only by ensuring social justice and by the opening of new opportunities. Redistributive measures yield better results when the development pie gets larger. Many of the problems plaguing Nepal today are rooted in the over-centralization of polity and the consequent neglect of the aspirations of the diverse population of the hill-mountain regions. A strategy for mountain development can also provide the basis for addressing this long neglected agenda, an agenda that is at the very heart of Nepal's evolution as a nation-state. As the prospects for peace loom larger in the horizon can our planners and politicians seize this opportunity?

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\* *Dr. Sharma, Geographer/Fulbrighter is a noted development planner and environmental researcher in Nepal.*



FAAN Vice President Mr. Madan Mohan Das proposes a vote of thanks.



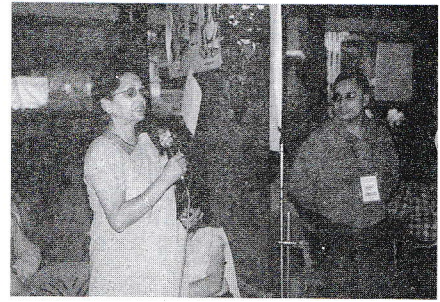
FAAN Secretary Dr. Shreedhar Gautam welcomes the audience.



FAAN Treasurer Mr. Ram Bhakta Amatya has taken good care of Forum logistics to make the Forum click.

## Forum Topics

- Envisioning Democracy.  
What the people make out of democracy?
- Constitution, Rule of Law and Democracy:  
Citizens and the State Apparatus
- Giving Voice to Voiceless:  
Women in Democracy.
- We Cannot be Free and Ignorant:  
Democracy and Citizens' Education
- Towards Stakeholder Democracy:  
Integrating democratic practice to people's livelihood.
- Building Democratic Future:  
Youth Power in Democracy.
- Strengthening Grassroots Democracy  
Local governments and social transformation.
- Towards Inclusive Democracy:  
Regionalism, Ethnicity and Self-governance.
- Putting People First.  
Political Parties in Democracy.



Democracy is about people sharing their views in open public forum, says this social worker.



Youth power means so much to strengthen democracy and women power too must be a part of it, avers this youthful voice.

### For further information:

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